

## Message Text

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ACTION OPR-02

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1590

UNCLAS NOUAKCHOTT 927

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: ALLOW MR

SUBJECT: INCREASE IN COST OF LIVING ALLOWANCE

FOR CHARLES BROWN, A/ALS FROM AMBASSADOR

1. BY NOW YOU WILL HAVE RECEIVED OUR REVISED RETAIL PRICE SCHEDULE. IT WILL BE OBVIOUS TO YOU, AS IT WAS TO ME, THAT OUR PEOPLE HERE ARE SPENDING SIGNIFICANTLY MORE NOW THAN THEIR PREDECESSORS WERE IN 1970, WHEN THE LAST SCHEDULE WAS SUBMITTED. IN 1970, FOR EXAMPLE, AN AVERAGE HOUSEBOY RECEIVED DOLLARS 47.10 PER MONTH COMPARED TO DOLLARS 111.90 TODAY. A DOZEN EGGS COST DOLLARS 1.30 THEN VERSUS DOLLARS 2.62 TODAY--WHEN WE CAN FIND THEM.
2. PRICES OF IMPORTED ITEMS HAVE RISEN IN SCALE, WITH TRANSIT AND TRANSPORT FEES TAKING A DEEPER AND DEEPER BITE. BECAUSE SENEGAL AND MAURITANIA HAVE ABROGATED THEIR CUSTOMS CONVENTION, WE ARE NOW OBLIGED TO CLEAR ALL IMPORTED SHIPMENTS OF FOOD STUFFS AND OTHER SUPPLIES THROUGH THREE (3) CUSTOMS POINTS--DAKAR, ROSSO AND NOUAKCHOTT. ACCUMULATED TRANSPORT AND OTHER FEES TOTAL 80 PERCENT OF THE VALUE OF THE AVERAGE SHIPMENT. WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO SAVE MONEY BY SHIPPING DIRECT FROM EUROPE OR THE US TO NOUAKCHOTT, BUT ALL BUT ONE MINOR SUPPLY HOUSE REFUSED TO FOLLOW THIS ROUTINE DUE TO THE FACT MAJOR OCEAN SHIPPING LINES DO NOT FREQUENT THIS TINY LIGHTERAGE PORT.
3. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THE DOLLAR REVALUATION HAS ALSO HIT US HARD--TODAY THE DOLLAR IS WORTH 42 UM; IN 1970 THE SAME DOLLAR BOUGHT CFA EQUIVALENT OF 55 UM.

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4. WITH MAURITANIA'S DEPARTURE FROM THE FRANC ZONE AND THE CREATION OF THE NEW NATIONAL CURRENCY, THE OUGUIYA, WE HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO IMPORT MORE AND MORE BASIC NECESSITIES FROM SENEGAL, THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE. BEEF, CHICKEN AND EGGS--ALL LOCALLY PRODUCED AND USUALLY AVAILABLE IN QUANTITY--HAVE OVER THE PAST MONTH ALL BUT DISAPPEARED FROM THE SHELVES. IMPORTED CANNED GOODS AND EVEN THE LOCALLY-PROCESSED CANNED TUNA ARE HARD TO FIND NOW. LAST WEEK WE SENT THE EMBASSY CHAUFFEUR TO DAKAR TO BUY ABOUT 90 POUNDS OF BEEF. THIS WEEK WE WERE OBLIGED TO CALL UPON THE USAF, WHICH IS ARRIVING HERE SHORTLY TO BEGIN AN EMERGENCY GRAIN AIRLIFT, TO BRING US SOME 3000 POUNDS OF US CANNED GOODS AND HOUSEHOLD SUNDRIES NO LONGER AVAILABLE HERE.

5. IN SUM, I FIND THE CONTINUED RISE IN THE COST OF LIVING HERE ASTONISHING EVEN BY OUR HIGH AND HARD AMERICAN STANDARDS. IN FAIRNESS TO THE OFFICERS AT THIS POST, I FEEL JUSTIFIED IN URGING YOU APPROVE AN IMMEDIATE COST-OF-LIVING ALLOWANCE INCREASE. MURPHY

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